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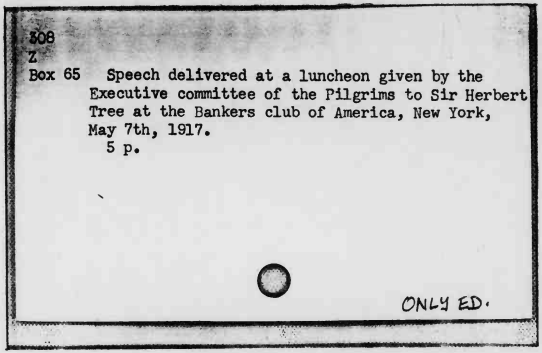
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Box 65 Speech delivered at a luncheon given by the Executive committee of the Pilgrims to Sir Herbert Tree at the Bankers club of America, New York, May 7th, 1917.
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Box 64

Speech

delivered at a luncheon

given by

The Executive Committee

of

The Pilgrims

to

Sir Herbert Tree

at

The Bankers Club of America, New York

May 7th, 1917

13 Feb. 1926 - C.R.W.

MR. CHAIRMAN, SIR HERBERT AND FRIENDS:

It has been my privilege many times in the past to bid hail and farewell to eminent English, Irish and Scotch men of letters and actors who have honored us by their visits. We have been glad to see them, and after their triumphs in our country to couple our farewell and bon voyage with an earnest invitation to come again.

We are happy to include in this distinguished list our guest of to-day. He has peculiar claims upon our admiration and affection. He has always been most hospitable to Americans visiting the Mother Country, and on all occasions given cordial service for friendly relations between our two nations.

We are all fond of Shakespeare and there is no author so universally read and no dramatist whose productions and re-productions we love so well. I recall in my undergraduate days at Yale University that the student mind and imagination were captured by a wonderful preacher of that day in New Haven, the Rev. Doctor Bacon. It was his daughter who had inherited the creative and audacious mentality of her father, who believed and tried to prove that the author of Shakespeare's plays was Lord Bacon. It is singular how that Bacon cult grew and expanded and how much ingenuity was exhausted in endeavoring to enlarge the fame of the great philosopher and jurist into the all embracing accomplishments of the myriad minded Shakespeare. We, who love Shakespeare, owe a debt of gratitude to Professor Wallace of Nebraska and his wife, whose unselfish and laborious researches among the musty records and ancient documents of various repositories in London have restored to us from the dim and clouded past the daily life of Shakespeare, and enabled us to see him as he was in his own time as an ordinary man among his fellows and the incomparable genius among his fellow-workers in letters.

In every generation some actor of genius restores to us our

idols. We are indebted to Sir Herbert Tree for his high appreciation and splendid reproductions of these masterpieces. Our friend leaves us to encounter in order to reach his home perils of the sea unknown before, perils occasioned by savagery, a violation of all law, international, human and divine, a lust for the lives of innocent travelers never known before. It is a curious philosophy which believes that the killing of the weak will terrify the strong. It is a reversal of the experience of the ages, which is that the dullest natures are aroused to heroic deeds in protecting or avenging their defenceless kindred. "All the world is a stage," says Shakespeare, but there is now being acted, day by day, the tragedy of the centuries. The dynamic truth of the equality of all men before the law, and at the Judgment Seat of God has been working its way from Calvary to the battle of the Marne. Defeated in one country, it has been successful in another. It has overturned dynasties, it has changed the boundaries of kingdoms, it has peopled wildernesses with settlers seeking civil and religious liberty and successful in their search.

Now for the first time in history the whole world is in arms with autocracy, absolutism, feudalism, militarism on the one side and freedom and civilization on the other. The thought occurs in this presence that if Shakespeare could have created his masterpieces out of the limited material at his disposal, what wonders would have emanated from his fertile brain in picturing the actors and the acts, the motives and the aims, the ambitions and the sacrifices of this mighty struggle. Shakespeare had for the basis of his historical plays the Chronicle of Holinshed, probably the poorest history ever written. A genius who puts the divine spark into the mummy is not a plagiarist. By Shakespeare the dry dust of Holinshed's narrative became such immortal and living presentations of English history that the great Duke of Marlborough never read any other history than Shakespeare's plays and said they were the inspiration of his victories and his policies. So in his romantic plays a forgotten and worthless story was transformed into such

a realization of the loves, the hates, the passions, desires and ambitions of human nature that they appeal with equal force to every generation.

An American friend told me that some years ago he met the Crown Prince of Germany several times. His Royal Highness was very frank in statements of what he expected to do when he came to the throne. Apparently his most absorbing thought was that, with Germany's unquestioned superiority in her army, her navy could also be brought to a perfection where she could smash England and so remove the only great obstacle to her universal expansion and power. The tragedy of such a conception is that the day was not distant when this young man would have the power as the successor of his father to attempt this appalling task. An Austrian Arch-Duke was killed by a student and the aged Emperor sent a note to Serbia, because this student was a Serbian, giving that little kingdom twelve hours in which to surrender her sovereignty or be destroyed. We have now been three years in war because of that note and because it was followed by the German Emperor's declaration of war against Russia and the German army's invasion and desolation of Belgium and part of France. The other day the German Emperor presented the Hohenzollern Museum at Berlin the pen with which he signed the papers that brought on the war. The pen with which the aged Emperor of Austria signed the manifesto to Serbia, and this pen of the Kaiser dripped not with ink but with blood. According to a recent statement there have already died in this war, killed in battle, by wounds and starvation and privations, as many people as constitute the population of Great Britain. To bring that statement home, every man, woman and child in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois and Indiana, would have to be swept off the face of the earth to equal this holocaust.

This war must end only when no man can ever again have the power to plunge his country and the world into war. It must

be so ended that no class can ever be so entrenched in authority that they have the same power. This world must be made a place where men and women can lawfully live and breath and move and have their beings in peace. When that time comes, if Providence shall give us another Shakespeare, the finest literature of the world will be commonplace compared to the creations of his genius. The stage then and forever after will become a great university teaching the triumph of liberty through the most ennobling sacrifices and heroic deeds and thoughts. We wish that peace and its interpreter may come soon enough for our friend to lead in the presentation of these plays.

As I look back over sixty years of intense activities and more than seventy-five years of easy recollections, it is difficult for me to grasp the changes and revolutions of the period. I was born and lived in the Village of Peekskill-on-the-Hudson, forty miles from New York. It was during the Revolutionary War on the borders of that neutral ground where the partisans of both sides mercilessly raided each others farms and were in perpetual battle. Peekskill was far enough from New York in my boyhood to have a population composed almost exclusively of Revolutionary families. There had been little immigration from the outside. The passions of that war were still intense. There were enough Revolutionary soldiers to fill the platform on the Fourth of July. On that day the war was fought over by the orator, the reader of the Declaration of Independence and the veterans of the Continental Army, and we boys danced around the bonfires singing, "Fi-fo-fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman, dead or alive I will have some."

For more than a generation the politician found twisting the tail of the British Lion and fighting over the battles of the Revolution was both popular and patriotic. It is within quite recent memory when a man was elected a Congressman and reached the Vice-Presidency of the United States, whose entire oratorical stock in trade was the war of the revolution as yet unsettled. The age of

miracles has returned. President Wilson's speech before Congress, one of the noblest utterances of our statesman, has placed the United States in the family of nations upon the eternal basis of humanity and liberty. The question, what this dreadful war has accomplished or will accomplish, is partly answered. The English speaking peoples of the world, of the United States, Great Britain and the self-governing Colonies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, are one in an alliance for the same ideals. Representatives of them all joined in singing "The Star Spangled Banner" in the old Cathedral of St. Paul in London. The Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes were entwined above the House of Parliament. In our own country the Allied flags float from the Capitol and White House at Washington and all over the land. Old Peekskill in our new birth of freedom has forgotten its inherited animosities, and from the ancient oak on Academy Hill, from which swung a British spy a hundred and thirty-seven years ago, to the Hudson River are intermingled the Stars and Stripes, the Union Jack and the Tricolor of France.

We all believe that those who have gone before are deeply interested in the people and the things they loved on earth. It is a wonderful Parliament which is watching this titanic battle. There are George Washington and George the Third, and Chatham and Burke, who were our friends, and Napoleon and Bismarck. Napoleon is saying to the German statesman, "When I predicted that Europe would be either Republican or Cossack, I should have said, it will be either Prussian or Republican. You are unchanged but the Cossack has become a Democrat." Washington, Chatham and Burke are rejoicing that the union which they desired, and which was impossible a century ago, by the success of liberal institutions in the United States reacting upon the Mother Country and its colonies extending around the earth, has belted the globe with English speaking nations each working out its own destiny and all united in promoting that higher civilization in which there is free growth of humanity and liberty.

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